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SENSITIVE
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TAGS: [PREL](#) [KCRM](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [KDEM](#) [UNMIK](#) [YI](#)
SUBJECT: KOSOVO MISSING PERSONS DIALOGUE: SLOW PROGRESS
BEHIND CLOSED DOORS

REF: A. PRISTINA 265

- [1](#)B. PRISTINA 608
- [1](#)C. PRISTINA 480
- [1](#)D. PRISTINA 282

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SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED, PROTECT ACCORDINGLY

[1](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY. Families of the missing gathered in Pristina and Gracanica on August 30 to commemorate the International Day of Missing Persons, protest lack of progress in resolving cases and bring public attention to the almost 2,300 persons still missing from the Kosovo conflict. Although the International Committee of the Red Cross has temporarily halted further public sessions of the Pristina-Belgrade working group due to lack of progress, dialogue continues in closed sessions. Serious disagreements remain between the organizations involved, and an overall lack of political will prevents work on discovering new gravesites. Internationals are also concerned that progress will slow even further if these competencies are transferred to the Kosovo government. END SUMMARY.

Families Mark the International Day of Missing Persons

[1](#)2. (SBU) An estimated 400 Kosovo Albanians (in Pristina) and 150 Kosovo Serbs (in Gracanica) gathered peacefully on August 30 to mark the International Day of Missing Persons and to protest the lack of progress in determining the fate of the missing. In Pristina, PM Ceku spoke at an official exhibition organized by the Provisional Institutions of Self Government (PISG) Commission for Abducted and Missing Persons, saying that Kosovo will never find peace as long as the fate of the missing remains unresolved.

[1](#)3. (SBU) According to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), there are still 2,284 persons missing from the Kosovo conflict; approximately 660 of those are

non-Albanians, mostly Kosovo Serbs. While PM Ceku's rhetoric is encouraging, Acting Director of UNMIK's Office of Missing Persons and Forensics (OMPF) Valerie Brasey has told us there is an ongoing rift between the family members associations and the PISG commission over what they consider a lack of political will to resolve outstanding cases.

ICRC Temporarily Halts Public Working Group Sessions

¶4. (SBU) Pristina ICRC Head of Mission Gherardo Pontrandolfi told us on September 1 that ICRC has temporarily halted public sessions of the Pristina-Belgrade Working Group on Missing Persons, saying it is unfair to the families to hold what are essentially media events, when there is no real progress to report (Ref A). Pontrandolfi said that although the PISG is pushing hard for an immediate public session to maintain the appearance of progress, he hopes there will be enough real progress to justify holding a session by the end of this year.

Progress Is Slow Even in Closed Sessions

¶5. (SBU) Pontrandolfi said that as opposed to the rancor of public sessions, frank and open debate has taken place between the Pristina and Belgrade delegations at closed sessions of the full working group on July 5 and September 1, and in closed sessions of the sub-working group on forensics. Protection Coordinator of the ICRC Belgrade office Mona Sadek told visiting USOP PolOff on August 24 that some progress has been made in the closed sessions, including joint planning for a visit to a possible mass grave site near the Administrative Boundary Line (ABL) in Serbia, and discussions about reducing the International Commission on Missing Person's (ICMP) current 99.99% DNA match threshold in order to identify more of the bodies that have already been exhumed (Ref B). She added, however, that the Belgrade delegation insists its work

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is "done" now that Serbia has returned all 829 bodies found to date in mass graves in Serbia, and that they say it is time for Pristina to reciprocate. The next closed session of the full working group is scheduled for October 19.

¶6. (SBU) Pontrandolfi welcomed PM Ceku's remarks, but insisted that Ceku could obtain information about gravesites from Kosovo Protection Corps (KPC) contacts if he wanted to. Pontrandolfi speculated that the Kosovo government is concerned about its image during ongoing status negotiations and fears revealing information that could incriminate Kosovo Albanians. He also claimed that Contact Group (CG) countries, with the exception of the U.S., seemed uninterested in missing persons, and urged the U.S. and the CG to pressure Ceku to do more to make this issue a priority. He added that Ceku needs to fulfill his promise to give written orders to all ministries to deal efficiently with requests from the working group.

Internationals Not Ready to Hand Over Competencies

¶7. (SBU) Pontrandolfi expressed concern for the future, saying there is "no local capacity" to take over competencies related to missing persons, now administered by UNMIK. Internationals from OMPF and the International Committee on Missing Persons (ICMP) have expressed similar sentiments to us. OMPF says they are training local staff on technical and forensic issues (Ref C), but that overall skill levels remain very low. An August 25 ICMP proposal states that "there are no functioning structures in the government that can oversee the diplomatic, political, judicial and technical aspects of the process," and recommends the creation -- with ICMP support -- of a high-level operational commission that would take over all political and operational functions related to missing persons. (ICMP presented these ideas in an August 17 discussion paper to the new PISG Ministry of Justice.)

¶8. (SBU) COMMENT. The missing persons issue remains a crucial impediment to multiethnic reconciliation in Kosovo (Ref D), yet has been largely neglected. While this is a highly politicized issue that the unscrupulous will continue to use as a bludgeon, it remains a fundamentally human tragedy. Our approach will be to encourage all parties, including the international actors involved, to consider methodologies for continuing work on missing persons in the post-UNMIK era, without which these issues will remain unaddressed for the long term. END COMMENT.

¶9. (U) Post clears this message in its entirety for release to Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari.

¶10. (U) Embassy Belgrade has cleared this cable.
KAIDANOW